

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has argued that recent uses of Fanon's work in cultural studies have been one-sided. Because of this, it set itself the task of 'rehistoricising' Fanon. Part One reviewed his major works and the contexts in which they were written. Part Two looked at the history of the appropriation of Fanon's work. Using a selective sample it demonstrated the one sidedness of present readings of Fanon as well as ways in which his work has been taken up piecemeal in a range of contexts. Part Three drew all these threads together to produce a fuller picture of Fanon's work and its overall relevance to debates in social science. This thesis drew out the themes of culture, class and the psychology of oppression. The analysis of cultural patterns that Fanon identifies in his dialectical theory of culture has broad relevance. This was demonstrated by using it to analyse various situations. The three-stage pattern which traces the breakdown of a primary Manicheanism into assimilationist, retreatist and fighting stages which is a theme that unites all of his work is also useful in developing a synoptic reading strategy.

Re-Reading Fanon

- **In this re-appropriation of Fanon the first task was to avoid the error of narrowly focusing on one part of his work to the exclusion of others.**

While selectivity has its place the recent uses of Fanon have been focused on his early work and grounded in a psychoanalytic reading. This reading implies that for Fanon's work to retain its relevance it must be appropriated to 'postmodern' concerns about the decentred subject and the need for the deconstruction of texts with a more or less explicit rejection of the issue of class and anti-imperialist politics. In contrast the 'first wave' of debates around Fanon's work was in the Marxist movement and centred on issues of relevance to national liberation struggles of various kinds. Here Fanon's concerns about agency and psychology including his radical clinical work were submerged by debates about the role of class and revolutionary strategy.

In order to avoid this division Part One of the thesis elaborated a re-reading of all of Fanon's work including his clinical observations. This re-reading of Fanon sought to refocus attention on the entire corpus of his work and show the themes that linked it together as well as its development. Crucial to any reading of Fanon's work is to locate it in the social milieu in which it was produced. What links his work together in one form or another is the colonial situation. The heuristic he used to explore it was that of Manicheanism, read through the post war revival of Hegel and of Sartre's phenomenological approach more generally. Rather than focus as contemporary theorists do on Black Skin White Masks (or indeed as earlier theorists did on Wretched of the Earth) this thesis has developed a more thematic reading of his work. Here it is his dialectical theory of cultural change that is crucial.

- **This re-reading included a drawing out of Fanon's critique of psychoanalysis.**

The recent appropriations of his work do not deal with Fanon's own criticisms of psychoanalysis and Fanon's ambivalent relationship with it. Fanon is quite eclectic in his use of psychoanalytic concepts and he is in many ways deeply sceptical of Freud. Even though he opens his discussion in Black Skin White Masks with the Freudian 'what does the black man want?' he dismisses the idea of the Oedipus complex on Martinique. He often uses dreams as a source of information but asserts that in the colonial situation 'the discoveries of Freud are of no use to us here.' Dreams need to be analysed not in relation to the unconscious but in their social context. Fanon's rhetorical deconstructive strategy begins by asserting the usefulness of Freud before exposing its limitations. This it does not by showing its textual ambiguities *a la* Derrida but the contradictions between the text and the effects of its concrete application. This exposes its Eurocentrism. It questions the effect *of* the inclusion of black people into the theory. Fanon also looks at the effect *on* black people. For example, he notes that Negroes are phobogenic objects in Freud's theory of the 'unconscious'. Fanon does not just dismiss this as racist but raises two questions. Firstly, why this should be so? For Freud and Jung it did not require an explanation but Fanon challenges them to explain it. Secondly, Fanon asks, given that Blacks are phobogenic, how does this relate to the fact that black people are not just part of the contents of the unconscious but are real people? Blacks inhabit bodies that are phobogenic for others. The 'unconscious' here consists of repressing an aspect of the social relations in which we stand with others.

Fanon's Theory of Cultural Change

- **Central to Fanon's work is his dialectical theory of cultural change.**

The three stages of cultural change are assimilation, retreatism and a 'fighting' stage. In Black Skin White Masks Fanon explores the phenomenological effects of assimilationism in detail though he never isolates this from the broader context. Here the Manichean division is between black and white. In A Dying Colonialism he is focused on the retreatist phase and fighting phases of the division between coloniser and colonised. Initially everything about French colonisation is rejected because it is imposed as part of the colonial project. Fanon argues that self-liberation is necessary and that even things with the potential to liberate like feminism and medicine are corrupted in the colonial milieu. He shows how oppression creates forms of resistance - in this case 'the cult of the veil' - and illustrates the 'historical dynamism' of what appear to be fixed traditions.

With the outbreak of armed struggle the old structures break down and things take on new meanings. The radio and medicine are no longer simply tools of the enemy but weapons in the struggle. What stands out is the way in which the oppressed are seen as agents of the struggle, this is particularly striking in regard to women. Fanon makes clear throughout that the only way to an authentic existence for the colonised is revolutionary praxis and the change in consciousness that it provokes. The three responses to oppression are also evident in his clinical work with phobic patients in hospital. Finally in Wretched of the Earth the colonial situation and how to change it looms large. There is a break with psychoanalysis and a greater focus on the social conditions though the Hegelian Master/Slave narrative still lies at the root of his thinking. Here an analysis of the fighting stage of the Algerian struggle itself looms large. The context of armed struggle and its opponents as well as a synoptic reading of the first three chapters helps to contextualise Fanon's (in)famous views on violence as well as his analysis of the dynamics of class and revolutionary strategy.

The first chapter of Part Two returned to Algeria to test his findings in relation to that particular struggle. In general it was found that his analysis made good sense in that context and his predictions as to the course of events would be played out both in Algeria and in most anti-colonial struggles. The decline of Algeria into a bloody civil war served as a contemporary test case of Fanon's cultural theory. Using Fanon's three stages of cultural response it assessed what Fanon's analysis from Wretched of the Earth might say about this new Manichean situation. His observations about the dynamics of a Manichean situation giving rise to a process of change are still relevant. The present cultural battle is centred on a struggle over the meaning of the past. Though Fanon saw the 'retreat' stage as progressive in the context of the War of Independence it is not necessarily the case.

It was Cabral who made it clear that the 'retreat' stage is only important if it leads to the petty bourgeoisie identifying with the struggle of the masses. Cabral links the three-stage cultural process more directly to the class structure than Fanon and was generally more clear about the matter of the party and program which was needed. This included the need to challenge not just the coloniser's ideas but the negative, especially patriarchal, ideas in one's own culture. The chapters on Iran and the Academy also demonstrated the usefulness of Fanon's dialectical approach. Turning to recent appropriations of Fanon results in a great deal more ambivalence. Fanon's work, especially Black Skin White Masks, has served as an important text both as data and evidence for contemporary modes of literary analysis. On the whole as an appropriation of Fanon's work it is largely a retreat from his anti-imperialist concerns. This thesis characterised this appropriation in Fanonist terms as a 'retreatist' stage which consists in a rejection of the old notions of truth and humanism in favour of a cultural relativism and difference. Bhabha's appropriation of Fanon specifically rejects the premises that are the basis of Fanon's work.

As mentioned deconstruction for Fanon involves, not so much a focus on the contradictions *within* the text, but between the text and the social context that it is a product of. For example, by reinserting Mannoni's theory of the dependency complex into its 'proper time and place' its ideological underpinnings are made clear. Some literary theorists like Said, Parry and JanMohamed have endeavoured in their own ways to use Fanon as a critique of imperial social relations. While this thesis has not attempted an assessment of their work as literary theorists it does seem that a political reading is more apposite to a Fanonist inspired project of fighting colonialism and the building of a genuine humanism than the predominant readings of him as a 'premature poststructuralist.'

Role of Class

- **Fanon's assessment of the role of class in struggles against imperialism is central.**

This thesis argued that Fanon was the first to introduce class analysis into Africa and that, in general terms, these aspects of his work proved accurate. His warnings about the bourgeoisie as well as the need for a political program that went beyond nationalism now seem confirmed. The question of the role of class is still a crucial one, even if recent appropriations tend to submerge this by their interest in culture. While there have been changes in the imperial character of global capitalism, now in its neo-liberal guise, it is still substantially the same as it was for Fanon. The world is still marred by imperialist's bombing and blockading countries, ethnic cleansing, racism, crime and reactionary forms of identity politics. Fanon's analysis of the limits of nationalism and

dangers of neo-colonialism are still relevant in a world that is still based on relations of dominance and submission. In addition returning Fanon to debates in the revolutionary movement suggests that there is a huge amount of knowledge production that took place outside academic circles which now might be reassessed. These debates took place in revolutionary movements which sought to use them as a basis for action.

This thesis located Fanon firmly in the debates about the role of classes in social change and concluded in relation to the:

- **Petty bourgeoisie**

It is the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie (or the 'illegallists' as Fanon calls them) that are a key force in the anti-colonial struggles. Fanon warned of the dangers of this class taking the coloniser's place as did Cabral. Cabral also noted that there are those in the petty bourgeoisie that identify with the people and can lead the struggle against colonialism. In orthodox Marxism the role of the petty bourgeoisie was a subsidiary one though this has proved not to be the case in former colonial countries.

- **Proletariat**

Fanon (and Cabral) both found that working class do not have the same role as in Europe. Though Fanon is more vague about exactly who is included in this group it is clear that in the post-war independence struggles urban workers had a larger role than Fanon was prepared to recognise. For Cabral among wage earners 'there is a majority committed to struggle' but they are difficult to mobilise, while for Fanon they are 'pampered.'

Fanon's remarks on the role of trade unions are not borne out by the Algerian experience. It was trade union organising that ended the factional civil war between the ALN and GPRA, and the UGTA, even though it was an FLN front, still served as a pressure group on the FLN. While Fanon says they are 'pampered' and their demands scandalise the 'nation', this is an example of the way in which his nationalist politics leads him into moralising (Farber 1981). The bourgeois forces claim the workers are 'selfish' and use this to divide the population. It is not a case of the proletariat selfishly pursuing its aims against the peasantry but against the ruling elite. Despite the co-option and bureaucratisation of the process, worker's interests lay with pursuing their material interests from which the working population benefits not the bourgeoisie. 'Self management' did serve as a potential pole of attraction for genuine socialism. However, it was eventually brought under state, and thus bourgeois, control rather than fulfilling the promise of 'land to the tiller'.

- **Lumpenproletariat**

In relation to the *lumpenproletariat*, Fanon was prepared to give them a larger role than orthodox revolutionary theory allowed. Despite their often reactionary role he saw them as a potentially revolutionary force. Cabral, who uses the term *déclassé*, finds one section that largely serves the Portuguese police against the struggle (this is the section that orthodox Marxism focused on in the West). However, there is a second group that has a broad perspective and join the struggle early. With developments since the time that these two wrote it may well be necessary to return to these reassessments. The urban poor in shanty towns at the present represent a significant social force if they can be organised. While a reactionary role cannot be ruled out, in contemporary struggles this group's role may need to be reassessed in the light of historical changes.

- **Peasants**

Fanon saw the peasants as custodians of culture and 'spontaneously revolutionary', and like the *lumpenproletariat* as having nothing to lose, so they will resort to arms. Cabral agrees that the peasants preserve the culture but not that they are 'spontaneously revolutionary'. They need to be educated and trained and to do this requires the preparation of a cadre force that has developed a revolutionary consciousness and a program to develop the nation. Here Fanon and Cabral are on opposite sides of a long-standing debate about the role of the peasantry. The Vietnamese communist Nguyen Nghe also argues that peasants can never attain revolutionary consciousness on their own. This reflects the different history of the struggles. In Vietnam and Guinea-Bissau there was a revolutionary party, in Algeria there was not. Fanon agrees with the need for organisation and program but gives less emphasis on the need for new structures and preparation to develop the people's consciousness.

- **The Role of Organisation and Limits of Nationalism**

It is clear from this reassessment that Fanon's work with the FLN restricted his view of the importance of forging a revolutionary organisation with a clear program. While it was less clear at the time it seems a fair conclusion that organisation and program need to be forged together. Fanon was critical of the FLN's lack of ideology and relied heavily on the notion of spontaneity as a force for social change. In the debates about class Fanon warned about the role of the emerging comprador bourgeoisie inside Algeria. This highlighted the limitations of nationalism which Fanon argued must lead to a broader consciousness if it was going to lead to genuine liberation.

The FLN's lack of a clear ideological framework was the cause of much of this. As Fanon put it in Wretched of the Earth:

If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness. The nation does not exist except in a programme which has been worked out by revolutionary leaders and taken up with full understanding and enthusiasm by the masses (1965b: 161-2).

The program and organisation to achieve this never materialised. Fanon saw the danger within broad national liberation fronts that to maximise participation overall goals are left vague and focus is instead on the immediate objective. This creates difficulties later because everyone agrees on the 'minimum demands' and leaves crucial questions like the nature of the post-revolutionary society, the role of women and so on until after independence when it is often too late. Fanon hoped for a party that 'should be a direct expression of the masses' (1965b: 150) but the FLN never transformed itself into such a vehicle. The sort of education and organisation needed would have been very difficult to establish in the post-colonial period. This leads to the question of the stages in the process of social change.

- **Stages of social change**

Fanon wrote about the stages of social change dismissing the role of the colonial bourgeoisie in development. This has proved a contentious issue. The task of bringing about a bourgeois democracy fell historically to the European bourgeoisie to implement first. These tasks required rallying all the classes against the aristocracy. In the periphery of the global capitalist economy it was not an issue about which tasks needed to be carried out by which class but which class would

carry these out. For the orthodox Marxists who promoted a strictly stagist view it was necessary that these tasks be carried out by the bourgeoisie. Fanon, in effect took a position against this.

The key thesis that requires investigation in regard to the role of class dynamics and alliances with the bourgeoisie is outlined by Ahmed (1993: 230). He argues that decolonisation came more quickly when the national bourgeoisie was secure, the threat of more radical elements providing them with a lever against the coloniser. Regardless of the different paths the transfer of governmental power to postcolonial states under bourgeois nationalist control was completed by the mid-1960s. Where the emerging bourgeoisie was sidelined by the socialist Left in Southern Africa and mainland Southeast Asia, the decolonisation project converged with socialism.

The Chinese revolution provided leadership as did the example of Vietnam. Where the bourgeoisie achieved that hegemony they have never been overturned in a subsequent stage by another class. Where the working class achieved hegemony, they allied with the bourgeoisie against the colonialists but this gave the independence movement in Guinea-Bissau, Vietnam and China a socialist dynamic from the beginning. This does not mean that the outcome of those struggles was ideal or that socialism is inevitable. Once the working class takes power there are new problems of imperial pressure and bureaucratisation to meet. It would seem that hegemony then is the key issue in debates over strategy, though this requires further testing.

Gender

- **Fanon's work and the development of a post-nationalist feminism**

The importance of an ideologically clear starting point in the struggle is reinforced in relation to the struggle for women's liberation. On women and Algeria, Fanon (1965b: 161) remarks that there is a danger of 'perpetuating the feudal tradition that holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine'. While women's brave participation could have led to a rethinking of roles as Fanon described, participation alone was not sufficient to challenge the traditional role of women. Women like most participants were fighting for national independence and the preservation of their culture from the French, not for a program that involved the liberation of women. While sympathetic to Fanon, Algerian feminists' chief response to him is that his nationalism helped create a myth that the national liberation struggle would lead to women's liberation. While he certainly has his limitations, his analysis remains useful.

In relation to Arab feminism the debates centre on the need to develop a post-nationalist feminism that is non-Eurocentric and can address the needs of all women, in some ways an extension of Fanon's earlier arguments about the limits of nationalism and spontaneity. There is a need to develop a feminist approach that addresses the questions of race, class and gender in an integrated way and Fanon has a useful role to play in thinking these through. Gilliam identifies two issues that are central to women and without which women's equality is impossible. One is 'independent access to money or resources that enable women to contribute to their own and their children's livelihood' and the other 'control over the reproductive decisions that relate to their bodies' (1991: 217-9).

As reflected in the earlier discussion a genuine revolutionary movement must build a broad front against women's inequality. This requires that the basis of struggle must be *issues* rather than gender, ethnicity or sexual identity. Furthermore Tohidi (1991) spells out the conclusion based on

the experience of women in national liberation struggles: 'Specific demands of women must be incorporated into the national anti-imperialist movement and class struggle right from the beginning'. Here the work of Cabral and the PAIGC shows the type of direction that is necessary. The class divisions in Algeria are also important, if somewhat neglected by Fanon in this context.

- **Fanon and radical black feminism**

For both nationalist and black radical feminisms, the focus has been on political economy and the need for systematic change. For them the liberal focus on the need for equal access and issues of identity can easily lead to a feminist politics that reifies gender seeing men and women as two distinct classes - all men are oppressors and all women are sisters. This disguises the privileged position of Western feminism - their economic privilege and their control over the system of representation (Gilliam 1991). As bell hooks (1992: 80) says that while it is crucial in a patriarchal society that every woman finds her voice it is also crucial to ask what sort of politics animates what is being said. Fanon interrogated the specifics of women's oppression but was not women-centred; he seeks the abolition of sexism as part of bringing about human freedom, of moving women (and men) from being objects to subjects of history.

The Psychology of Oppression

- **The self as ensemble of social relations**

A final aspect of Fanon's work which has not been adequately accounted for is what this thesis has labelled his relational view of the self. His whole work can usefully shed light on a model of the individual as a dialectic of structures. Fanon attempts to understand the world of consciousness dialectically as a series of structures that shape consciousness, which is always partial and contradictory. This reflects two things, first, the assumption that reality is contradictory. It is attempts to resolve such contradictions that provoke 'psychological' problems. And secondly that our knowledge of such reality is partial - both in the sense of incomplete and in the sense of favouring the interests of one side. Using Fanon's views as a method allows one to explore, not just the objective world, but the ways in which features of the objective world are mediated into 'lived experience'.

Although Fanon does not spell out such a method this thesis has attempted to begin the process of sketching a Fanonist 'sociology' from this perspective. Fanon provides a number of bridges between structure and agency but at the heart of them is the master/slave dynamic that allows one to begin to break out of the mentalist view of the self. By seeing that our private 'personal' self is constructed in relation to others, particularly in relations of dominance and submission, the 'self' is shown to be not really 'private' at all.

This is apparent from the earliest of Fanon's works. He begins with what is apparently quite a personal exploration of his 'experience' of racism. While he identifies personal experiences and labels them an 'inferiority complex' it is clear to him from the outset that such a complex is not 'psychological' in the usual sense. It is not a problem in his head, nor is it a problem in 'society', nor does it come from the 'unconscious'. Fanon is aware of the racism and its effects. He explores the effects of racist structures as part of the 'ensemble of social relations' that inform his sense of

self and that of other blacks like him (though early on he is less clear that he is a quite specific type of black man on the basis of his class and gender).

Fanon's analysis rests on a relational sense of the self that is dialectical. Dialectics is used here to convey the idea that Fanon's focus is not so much on things as on processes. To understand such processes one must first abstract, that is, select the key elements in the process and describe them as a static picture which one then puts into motion. There are two propositions here. One is that the 'self' is not the locus of social action but is enmeshed in a set of relations (subjectively termed 'Others') in which the concept of a 'self' is not reified as an autonomous centre of consciousness but is seen as a process. For the purpose of analysis this process may be frozen, but needs increasingly to be made into a dynamic system of relations.

Our self-identity is a layered construct of retrospective selections, cultural norms and images that others have of us. In this sense the self is not centred in a 'psychological' realm but is the 'ensemble of social relations' not just in the objective but in the subjective sense (manifest for example, in the look of the other). Instead of Fanon being - to coin a phrase - a man among men, one's 'essence' is defined by an other. In Fanon's case the black body is located as a site of primitiveness and savagery, an object to be feared.

While in many respects the thesis has argued for a more structuralist understanding of Fanon it must also be noted that a key part of his work lies in linking the structural with the existential. Even his most existential work, Black Skin White Masks with its primary focus on agency and individual experience, it is always clear that these experiences are mediated by structures like class and gender. The three cultural stages unfolding from a Manichean social situation has been outlined but it is important to grasp how this has its parallel at the level of the individual. At an individual level any situation of oppression provokes a Manichean psychology. Whilst wary of psychologising the struggle it is, nevertheless, the case that the issue of consciousness and agency is a crucial one and finding ways to elaborate this has proved daunting for political activists and left-leaning psychologists and sociologists.

Future Directions

In relation to further work this thesis has contributed to a rethinking of Fanon via an examination of the themes that link his whole work and the variety of contexts in which he has been debated. It has demonstrated the restricted range of concerns of recent work in cultural studies and elaborated a Fanonist understanding of culture and class within debates about the self-determination of nations. While the world had undergone some dramatic changes since Fanon's death, his work provides a framework for re-thinking political strategies for anti-imperial struggles in the contemporary period.

Fanon challenges progressive thinkers in the West particularly to think through their own Eurocentrism. His willingness to challenge orthodoxy also highlights the need to be grounded not in abstractions but in concrete struggles. Although most of Fanon's contemporaries disagreed with him about the role of the peasants and lumpenproletariat, this is a matter of ongoing debate. In the present period it is necessary to reassess the role of the urban poor and peasants who while not 'spontaneously revolutionary' certainly occupy a different social position in a globalised society than they did in the post war period. While then the characterisation of them as 'feudal' may have been relevant it seems less and less appropriate as finance capital shapes social relations on the land. Nor are the urban poor simply the sons and daughters of peasants but are thoroughly

urbanised and form a massive poor of underemployed wage labour. Each of these elements requires a thorough reassessment in each concrete instance before generalisations can once again be made about how to achieve fundamental change in the new millennium.

Given the global economic decline it would seem that the conditions have never been better for a resurgence of liberation movements. Yet the traditional focus of the Western Left in grounding its critique in economic determinism, now in its guise as 'globalisation', do not provide the tools to confront the neoliberal agenda. Most people are at best politically disoriented, at worst, disinterested, despite the increasing disorder of their social lives. They turn away from collective action towards individual solutions, in effect accommodating to the neoliberal agenda. There are positive aspects. Like Fanon, who emphasised spontaneity, spontaneous acts of resistance, like crime and violence, directed at government symbols or property contain the seeds of resistance even if a 'legitimate desire for revenge cannot sustain a war of liberation' (Fanon 1965b: 111). However, it is forging this new anti-imperialist agenda that Fanon's work calls us to. Just as his work was an inspiration to anti-imperialist struggles around the world including the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the United States and Ali Shari'ati, the ideologist of the Iranian revolution. Fanon's calls to build a 'fighting culture' against imperialism based on the best elements of one's existing culture.

Aside from the issues of structure, a much neglected area by the traditional Left has been the issue of agency. This gap has been filled at least in academic circles in the West by poststructuralist debates about subjectivity and identity. While Fanon's work has been appropriated by postcolonial theorists, on the whole it is abstract and its premises deny the possibility of fundamental social change. It denies the utility of collective action by oppressed groups, preferring to study representations of colonial Others who can demonstrate the ambivalence of the colonial situation. Although the study of subjectivity is important the key issue is to look at which subjects are being studied. Instead of a focus on the ambiguities of a subject such as the widow of a British puppet governor like the Rani of Simur a Fanonist inspired project would follow the lines of Benita Parry's (1987) suggestion that Fanon's key problem was the construction of an identity in which difference is validated and the native is empowered to rebel. This provides an important clue to how such a Fanonist project might proceed.

To think around the issue of structure and agency requires a theory of the self that is processual or relational and this is implicit in Fanon work. His 'theory' of agency allows one to get a sense of the 'lived experience' of structures that is able to highlight contradictions. This is essential for building resistance to neo-liberalism and erecting a new power structure based on the working poor. The key challenge is to examine how men and women are moving from being objects to subjects of history despite the huge forces arraigned against them and then to examine the issues of structure and agency in a concrete context. Apart from a focus on impersonal forces, Fanon's work provides a guide as to how to overcome the problem of building resistance to economic rationalism and structural adjustment. Refocussing the study of the problem of 'identity' from the personal to the political - moving from the retreat to the fighting stage in Fanonist terms - is a key area for future work. This needs to be combined not with a theoretical analysis of subjectivity but a concrete analysis of actual movements of resistance to the neo-liberal agenda: the FZLN in Mexico, the FARC in Colombia and the movement of landless peasants in Brazil, all spring to mind as candidates for examining contemporary struggles against neoliberalism.